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James Marcus Out the Reservoir and Up the River

by Walter Goodman

In the middle of his life's journey, James Marcus found himself in a dark wood. He entered it after a fine bright year of success, the only completely successful year that he was to know. That came in 1965, when he was 35 years old and a volunteer in John Lindsay's campaign to be mayor of New York City. The Lindsay candidacy, an attack on the city's political masters, had to be run by outsiders, many of them new to municipal give and take, and James Marcus was one of these. He did the odd jobs that came his way—mainly following up potential sources of funds and support—and he won, along with the friendship of the new mayor, a place in the City Hall establishment. For the first time in his life, he could look forward to a position of consequence.

Until that good year, Marcus had played the part of the charming failure. He grew up in Schenectady, only child of a middle-class Jewish family. His father was a lawyer and sometime assistant district attorney; his mother a busy worker in a variety of causes. In his teens, owing to parental hopes for his future or exasperation with his scholastic past, he was sent off to military school, one of those places where characters are supposedly built. His later years at Union College and at the University of Pennsylvania [illegible] success and academic failure. He found that he was better suited to the softer pleasures of the campus than to the rigors of the classroom; his record spotted with Fs and cuts, he was dropped from both institutions. The jobs he held after finishing with college were of the sort that make impressive reading on a fellow's resume but are not otherwise sustaining. He was president of a short-lived investment firm in Chicago called James, Martin & Co., which never made any money. "It was a one-man operation, overhead extremely limited, a 10-by-10 office," reports the firm's secretary-treasurer. In 1960, according to the information released when he joined the Lindsay team, he became president of Chlorodyne Chemical Company, an organization that no one has been able to track down. In 1962 he got his fanciest connection, becoming head of a subsidiary of the large and famous advertising agency, Interpublic, Inc. The subsidiary, however—called Investors Marketing Services and designed to "assist" investors—was another small operation that did not last very long. Still, it had its uses. In a press release a few years later, which Marcus carried personally from City Hall to newspaper offices, this connection would be splendidly embellished by memory: Marcus described himself as having been "president of the I.M.S. subsidiary of Interpublic, Inc., a world-wide advertising and public-relations concern." Like a new wine in an old bottle, the Marcus career seemed inviting until uncorked.

Yet Marcus had charm. He cut a handsome figure, his boyish face improved by the early gray of his hair. He took pains with his grooming and his tailoring, his style up to date but not unduly innovative, appropriate, say, to a knowing young executive in a stock-brokerage house. An acquaintance of the time describes him: "He was nice and neat. Always had a suntan, always looked like he just came out of the shower."

Marcus was naturally attracted to affluent and swinging young New Yorkers. He gained entrance into their delectable ambiance with his marriage, in June, 1962, to Lily Lodge, daughter of John Davis Lodge, former governor of Connecticut and ambassador to Spain. (Thereafter, Marcus would sometimes have himself introduced as "the son-in-law of former Connecticut Governor John Davis Lodge," or a mouthful of words to that effect. The former governor, for his part, is not known to have advertised the new connection.) Jim and Lily had met at a theatrical colony in Maine.

Among the new friends whom he owed to Lily was John Lindsay, then Congressman from New York's Silk Stocking District. They met in 1964, and Marcus, free of worldly commitments, became a volunteer in the estimable young politician's 1965 mayoralty campaign. He was no major strategist, but his social talents served him well in making contacts in his candidate's behalf. Without the Lodge key, we may fairly assume, the doors of New York Republicanism would not have opened so wide to Marcus, so disastrously wide. "I thought he was the very nice son-in-law of a wealthy Christian family," a Lindsay aide of the time recalls dryly. Though short of the stamina that would have been required to work his way up through established party ranks, in the Lindsay camp he found a ready welcome. He owed his quick progress to the lack of

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